



# Introduction to the Six Yogas



The Six Yogas (*sbyor drug*), or Vajra-yogas (*rdo rje'i rnal 'byor*), are the perfection process (*rdzogs rim*) meditations of Kālacakra. The Vajrayana path is very structured, and before the Six Yogas can be practised, it is necessary first to perform a set of preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*), and then go on to the main yidam meditations, or generation process (*bskyed rim*) meditations of Kālacakra. In the Kagyu and Jonang traditions the yidam practice requires in addition to the regular generation process meditation a recitation of 10 million Kālacakra mantras.

These are all necessary preliminaries for the performance of the Six Yogas, although some favour practising both generation and perfection process meditations together after a significant grounding has first been developed in the generation process.

So, these are not practices for beginners, and there is no intention in these notes to describe how to perform any of the Six Yogas – in fact that will be deliberately avoided. However, the theory is worth describing, and the Six Yogas are perhaps the pinnacle of Vajrayāna practice, and consequently very important to Vajrayāna Buddhism as a whole.

Also, such practices are often shrouded with secrecy. There are several reasons for this. One is that these are powerful and effective practices, and if they are performed improperly, without proper supervision or preparation, they can in fact be damaging to an individual who practises them, perhaps out of impatience.

Translation note: **Six Yogas.** these are often confused with the Six Dharmas of Nāropa (*nā ro'i chos drug*), which are often called, quite wrongly, the Six Yogas of Nāropa. Wikipedia, for example, calls them this, and very bizarrely has that the "Tibetan term chos or chos is often translated as 'dharma'", and that they are "also called the *six dharmas of Naropa*". This is getting it completely the wrong way around. The Tibetan terms for both the Six Yogas and the Six Dharmas are translations from the Sanskrit in the first place!

The original Sanskrit term for Nāropa's system is dharma, and it is quite silly to translate the Tibetan translation of this (*chos*) back into Sanskrit as yoga. An authority? In the short instruction text on these Six Dharmas, written by Tilopa and translated into Tibetan by Nāropa and Marpa, the practice is referred to in the title as the *ṣaḍdharma* (six dharmas) – *ṣaḍdharmopadeśa*, *chos drug gi man ngag*.

Also, there is much direct sexual symbolism involved, particularly in the last two yogas, and these practices are kept secret in order to avoid any abuse or misinterpretation (a disposition for which is not confined to the west).

These notes therefore present the general theory underlying the practices of the Six Yogas – and to a great extent the generation process as well – and also give an overview of the Six Yogas themselves. This is mainly based on the work describing the theoretical underpinning of the Six Yogas by the Jonang writer Tāranātha: the *zab lam rdo rje'i rnal 'byor gyi rnam par bshad pa rgyas par bstan pa zung 'jug rab tu gsal ba chen po*. This is to be found in the fourth volume of the modern Dzamthang edition of his collected works, pp. 35-276.

There are quite a few technical terms introduced in these notes, not all of which are explained fully. There is a page in preparation for this site that will explain some of the more important terminology in the Kālacakra system.

### Meaning of Tantra

Like many other writers, Tāranātha's description starts by discussing the word tantra itself, and in particular the three tantras. These are the ground-, path- and result-tantras. (There are good reasons for translating the latter of those, *'bras bu'i rgyud* as goal-tantra, but the more usual result-tantra seems appropriate here.)

The whole subject matter of the



Detail from a painting of Kālacakra, preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Kālacakra Tantra itself is categorised as belonging to the ground, path or result. The ground is the state in which beings find themselves, the state usually known as saṃsāra, or cyclic existence. This discussion entails the reasons that beings constantly experience varying degrees of suffering, and are trapped in that state. This constitutes the first two chapters of the Kālacakra Tantra. The next two chapters deal with the path. These entail the empowerment or initiation of Kālacakra, and also the meditation practices: the generation and perfection processes. Finally, the fifth chapter, the title of which is Knowledge, deals with the result, or goal, of the practice, the state of enlightenment, plus many other subjects.

All things, all phenomena, are contained within these three tantras. They are therefore a way of classifying the whole of our experience, all the way from normal beings suffering from emotional conflicts to full enlightenment. The reason that they are termed tantras is because of the fact that there is a continuity between these three – they are different aspects of, or different experiences of, the same reality. They are not different.

Just about all texts when discussing this subject quote the earliest known Buddhist definition of the word tantra, found in the Guhyasamāja Tantra:

"Tantra is called continuity, and this tantra is classified into three aspects: ground, together with its nature, and inalienableness. Nature is the basic cause, ground is called the method, and inalienableness is the result. The meaning of tantra is contained in these three." (*rgyud ni rgyun chags zhes bya ste // rgyud de rnam pa gsum du 'gyur // gzhi dang de yi rang bzhin dang // mi 'phrogs pa yis rab phye ba // rang bzhin rnam pa rgyu yin te // gzhi ni thabs zhes bya ba'o // de bzhin mi 'phrogs 'bras bu ste // gsum gyis rgyud kyi don bsdus pa'o //*)

The language is somewhat different, but this is describing tantra as being the continuity between ground, path and result. That continuity is the reason that one is able to progress on the path, from the state of cyclic existence to complete enlightenment.

The Kālacakra Tantra also talks of the outer, inner and other. This is another way of classifying the different aspects of our experience. Outer refers to the outer physical world; inner refers to the body with its channels, winds and seeds; other refers to the nature of coincident reality, and included within this are the means to attain this "ultimate other", the methods of empowerment and the generation and perfection processes. (Other includes both path and result.)

As Tāranātha says: "...the chief meaning of these three tantras is the nature of reality, they are essentially indistinguishable, and the actual word tantra is employed in the following way: individuals experience in the three states the various phenomena of cyclic existence, the path and the result. These are distinct instances of the cause, path and result, and to this is applied the term tantra (continuum).

## Ground tantra

The ground tantra is also called causal tantra, reflecting the fact that the potential exists within the state of saṃsāra for the awakening to full enlightenment.

The essential nature of the causal tantra is known by such names as the radiant light Adibuddha, the reality of ultimate perfect enlightenment, and, tathāgatagarbha. These names indicate the fact that the nature of the minds of all beings has the characteristic of originally coincident bliss and emptiness.

But in ordinary beings, this true nature is obscured or defiled. We therefore talk in terms of the mind being in either an impure or a pure state. The impure state is the state of ordinary beings and is called saṃsāra-mind. When the defilements or obscurations are removed by the proper practise of the path, the pure state that results is called nirvāṇa-mind. Another pair of names for these two states are respectively conventional and absolute mind. They are also referred to as mind and nature of mind.

The only difference between these two states is the defilements or obscurations that exist in the minds of normal beings. These obscurations are called incidental, because they are not essential to the nature of mind and they are not real in any ultimate sense. Once they have been removed, and the true nature of mind perceived, the result is not a change to the nature of mind as such, but a direct perception of its true nature. This is the goal of enlightenment.

### The four states

A particular way used in Kālacakra to describe the causal tantra is the four states. These are the waking state, the dream state, the deep sleep state, and the fourth state (usually described as orgasm, but including some other experiences as well).

Tāranātha quotes the commentary to the Kālacakra Tantra, the Vimalaprabhā: "In this way the nature of cyclic existence is defined by the four aspects of waking, and so forth" (*de ltar 'khor ba'i sems kyī rang bzhin gyi sad pa la sogs pa'i dbye ba rnam pa bzhir nges pa'o*).

In the pure state, these four are referred to as the four vajras: of body, speech, mind and awareness. The word vajra is used to refer to something which is indestructible, cannot be cut, subdivided, destroyed, etc. These qualities apply to the nature of the ultimate state of mind, when free from all obscurations.

Another way this is described is to say that the causal continuum, the radiant light nature of mind, exists as the seed (potentials) of body, speech, mind and awareness. The meaning of this is that it is the vital essence of body, speech, mind and awareness, and for this reason it is referred to by the term bindu (*thig le*, drop or seed).

We therefore talk in terms of the four seeds or drops. They are the causal continuum for the four kāyas or the four vajras at the time of the result. From the point of view of the fact that they are the source of all the experiences of all beings they are included within the causal continuum, and as they are the cause for the four activities of all buddhas, they are included within the result continuum.

Ultimately, there is no cause of enlightenment, this same nature of mind is both the

ultimate cause and the ultimate result, but from the point of view of ordinary beings, the language of causality is used. Considering this from the point of view of the ground of saṃsāra, the four states are these seeds defiled.

### The reversibility of saṃsāra

Tāranātha states that: "This nature of mind free from artifices, exists as the awareness of coincident and indivisible unchanging great bliss and emptiness possessed of all ultimate characteristics. However, due to the erroneous appearances of attachment and so forth, the mental continuum of beings is obscured and they experience cyclic existence. As this error has no inherent existence, when it comes to be removed, this is the reversal of cyclic existence."

Cyclic existence, or saṃsāra, is characterised by the four states, the six skandhas, six elements, six senses, six sense objects, six organs and the six activities, and consists of the conventional experiences of happiness and suffering.

The reversal of cyclic existence is characterised by the four vajras, the six types of buddha, the six consorts, the six ultimate sattvas, their six goddesses, the six wrathfuls and the six dākinīs.

Tāranātha: "It is not the case that mind was earlier pure and later came to be newly defiled. If that were possibly true, then once the two obscurations had been got rid off, it would follow that they could come about again.

"It is also impossible for attachment and so forth to preceed mind; if this were possible it would follow that attachment and so on would have no cause. So, attachment and so forth do not arise in the absence of mind; if they were to, then flowers would grow in the sky, because they would similarly arise in the absence of their own basis.

"It is not incorrect to say both that the defilements and mind are of one essence, but are distinct. If it were, then the liberation of freedom from defilements would be impossible.

"Therefore, just as gold and it's ore come into existence together, if one exists, then both are together, then because the defilements have never been essential to mind, then when the defilements are removed not only is the nature of mind realised, but also the liberation of mind free from defilements."

The four seeds are the nature of reality. They are associated with the incidental defilements which are the dispositions of the four states, and from these arise all the phenomena of cyclic existence.

The incidental defilements which appear to be merged with the nature of reality are the essence of the base consciousness, which is sometimes referred to as the "great root mis-perception".

From the point of view of what is to be reversed, there are the dispositions (*bag chags*) and so forth of the four states. The self appearance of these gives rise to all the

appearances and thoughts of the four states and the eight qualities of gloom, passion and goodness, together with sounds, sensations, tastes, forms and smells. From these arise the skandhas, elements, senses, actions and so forth.

The language used often refers to winds, meaning on occasion literal physical winds, but also indicating processes. The winds drive certain experiences, and it is often likened to a rider on a horse – his mount.

From the root mis-perception arise two things with the characteristic of wind: the joyous wind which generates the fourth state, and the connate (*lhan skyes*) wind which creates the states of waking, dream and deep sleep.

Tāranātha states that "it is not that from this mis-perception physical winds are created, rather that these winds have the nature of wind in that they create the thought (structures) of the four states. From these arise the ten winds, the winds of the twelve ascendants, these create the senses apprehending the five objects, and following on from this are mind consciousness, and the self-centred emotional mind, and following these two aspects of mind, grow all the limitless range of thoughts."

An important point here is that the nature of mind, the causes of cyclic existence, and so forth, are being described in terms that are relevant to the Six Yogas and the style of practice that they represent.

There is also a three-fold classification described of this awareness: that it exists as the nature of the white and red elements and wind. In this case, root mis-perception, which is the defilement that obscures this awareness, exists as the subtle nature of the white, red and wind, and gives rise to more coarse potentials. The white and red are here the two primary seeds or drops. In terms of the human body, the white element is the one acquired from one's father, and the red element the one from one's mother.

The dispositions of the four states associated with the four seeds are only awareness and they do not exist in particular parts of the body. However, from the activity of the channels, winds and seeds of the forehead, the dispositions of the waking state are activated, and give rise to all appearances, perceptions and thoughts when one is awake.

Similarly, dream comes from those of the throat, deep sleep from the heart, and from the navel are activated the dispositions of the fourth state, to give rise to the appearances, perceptions and thoughts of sexual desire. In this way the four centres (within the body), the four vajras and the four states are associated together.

The three qualities (*yon tan gsum*) enter into this discussion in the following way. The base consciousness exists in the manner of potentials (or seeds) as the dispositions of the white, red and winds. The power of the winds cause thought, the nature of delusion (gloom, *mun pa*, *tamas*). The red element, the

Translation note: **Melting:** '*dzag pa* is a difficult word. It refers to the literal concept of sexual secretions, but also to the sense of loosening up, or opening up, during sexual and similar activities.



disposition of passion (*rdul*, rajas) causes the characteristic of desire. The disposition of the white element, goodness (*snying stobs*, sattva) causes the characteristic of the bliss that is associated with movement and melting.

Therefore root mis-perception, as it has the nature and form of the three poisons, is also called the inspiring bliss, the disposition of orgasm, and, the attitude of melting-bliss.

It causes the movements of the winds, and the generation of thoughts, and has the power to create the sixteen joys of the melting-bliss, and the coarse twelve links. As potential, the coarse states do not exist, but the subtle characteristics of winds, thoughts, joys and links do exist.

In this way, from the connection between the root mis-perception and the coarse body, arises the experience of saṃsāra, principally of the desire realm. Apart from a difference of level of subtlety and grossness with the form realm and formless realm, it is basically the same for them.

Furthermore, the activation of the power of wind from the dispositions of the three-fold white, red and wind, causes the movements of the winds of the twelve changes (these are associated with the central channel in the body). This stirs the red aspect and causes it to blaze; this in turn causes the white aspect to melt completely.

The movements of the winds, the blazing of the red aspect and the melting of the white aspect in general cause the creation of all the variety of thoughts, and, propelled by previous actions, other potentials are activated, and there appears all the appearances of self and others of the animate and inanimate worlds; the various emotional defilements that drive our activities are created.

Furthermore, by the increase of these emotions together with the winds, one accumulates actions that propel one into birth. These actions are of two kinds, the first is a normal type of action which mainly creates the world in which other births will occur, and the second special type of action which creates each being's individual body, their possessions, and so forth.

All of these animate and inanimate worlds are included within the skandhas, the elements and senses.

### **The creation of saṃsāra**

Mis-perception is the beginningless disposition of desire. Once that desire is activated, there is then change from that desire (all phenomena are transient, and subject to change). This change leads to separation from the object of that desire, and from that comes anger. The nature of anger is mindlessness and mindlessness is delusion. In this way mis-perception has the nature of desire, anger and delusion.

In brief, from the mental disposition of the melting-bliss arise the three factors of semen (white), seed (red) and wind. From these three arise one's present body, speech and mind. From the appearance of the channels, winds and seeds of this body, speech and

mind arise all the various appearances of the outer physical world.

Another very similar way of describing this process is given by Jamgon Kongtrul in his commentary to the text known as "The Profound Inner Meaning", written by the 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje (*rang byung rdo rje*).

In this description, the mental processes are described from the point of view of an initial split into subject and object – the word initial is not here intended to indicate any primal cause, rather this is an ongoing process.

This description entails the development of the six skandhas, the winds (processes) of the six elements and the basic emotional defilements.

1) The radiant light nature of mind. This is the skandha of basic awareness, the wind of awareness, and is also known as "great emptiness" as it entails no characteristics, no concepts and so forth.

2) Characteristics develop with the initial trend towards a split into subject and object; a false perception of something distinct from, or separate from mind. This is the skandha of the base consciousness and the space-wind. This association with space is understood in the sense that space provides for distance between things, and the first concept of there being something separate from mind entails the sense of separation, of space. This is the root of the emotional defilement of aversion (hatred), and is likened to the appearance of a candle.

3) Mind becomes curious or fascinated by this external, separate object, and "moves" towards it, responds to it. This brings with it emotional content, fascination and movement. This is the skandha of response, the motion of wind-wind, and the root of the emotional defilement of desire. It is likened to a multiplication of the candles, many more appearing.

4) Much has now been created, and mind starts to get caught in it's own creation, experiencing sensory functioning which is now cyclic. This is the skandha of sensation, the fire-wind, and the root of the emotional defilement of delusion. This entails the final loss of pure awareness, as though another

Translation note: **The skandhas:** *phung po*, usually five, and in Kālacakra six, with the addition of awareness. There are quite bizarre translations for these in (surprisingly common) use, and perhaps the most abused word is perception, given as either the third or fourth skandha. In a philosophical context, perception is (OED): "The action of the mind by which it refers its sensations to an external object as their cause." This entails no recognition/identification of the external object, and is therefore nowhere near the meaning of either of those two skandhas.

As briefly as possible: the skandha of **form** (*gzugs*, *rūpa*) consists of the material structure of the organs of sense and their objects, basically, the physical world.

When a sense organ comes in contact with an object, what occurs are sensations: visual, tactile, etc. These can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. These are not feelings, as often used here, as feelings refer to the sense of touch or emotionality and is an inappropriate word for the senses of sight, hearing, taste, and smell.



"reality" has taken over.

5) Mind now needs to make sense of this situation, and starts to interpret the sense perceptions, labelling things, making judgements, and so forth. This is the skandha of interpretation, water-wind (water as an element brings cohesion). Mind ascribes characteristics to objects, glueing the whole experience together, producing a false sanity.

6) Finally, the whole situation becomes set in, and mind acts on the basis of a mis-perceived reality. This is the skandha of form, and the solidity of the earth-wind.

This is the skandha of **sensation** (*tshor ba*, *vedanā*).

The skandha of sensations entails no recognition of what is sensed, and the mass of sensations needs to be understood; in the next step, mind identifies things (rightly or wrongly) and conceives of their inter-relationships (Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche's concise definition: *sgra dang 'brel 'dzin gyi rtog pa* ). This is the skandha of **interpretation** (*'du shes*, *saṃjñā*).

Having analysed the sensory world it is experiencing, mind then reacts, conditioned by relevant dispositions (*bag chags*, *vāsanā*) with affection, fear, fascination, various actions, etc., etc. This is the skandha of **response** (*'du byed*, *saṃskāra*).

The experience of all of these components is the skandha of **consciousness** (*rnam shes*, *vijñāna*).

As Herbert Guenther puts it in some of his discussions of this process, awareness has become concretized, hard, solid, etc. Water has turned into ice. The new reality is not something different, but it is mis-perceived. (See for example, H. V. Guenther, *Tantric View of Life*, p. 18, on this same section of "The Profound Inner Meaning".)

Before describing how one reverses this process by means of the path, Tāranātha writes: "From the combination of the inner dispositions manifesting as semen, seed and wind, and the objects, including one's body, of the appearances of the external world, emotions are generated and one accumulates actions which propel one towards other births. The initial emotional dispositions create in the future a variety of emotions. In this way all those wandering round in circles (*saṃsāra*) create from emotions arising in their own minds, *saṃsāra* with its nature of suffering. Nobody else creates the sufferings of *saṃsāra*, it is like a silk worm caught up in it's own cocoon."

### The reversal of *saṃsāra*

This perceptual error that traps beings in cyclic existence does not exist inherently. It is just a thought-construct, but that thought is created and maintained by the power of the dispositions, and the movements of the action winds.

It is necessary to apply an antidote to all this, and that is non-conceptual awareness which will suppress the action-winds. The action-winds are the processes that drive the split into subject and object, and all the thought processes that are thereby created. It is this (self-sustaining) process that needs to be turned back.

Once non-conceptual awareness has properly been developed, perceiving reality

directly without the constructs of appearance, one overcomes the disposition of changing bliss. With the action-winds stopped, the white and red aspects subside and the processes of the sixteen melting blisses and the twelve links stop.

This brings to an end the stream of previous activity, emotions and sufferings, and having overcome thought-constructs, this will not arise again, and the origination of existence through actions and emotions is exhausted.

As Tāranātha says: "Merely the collapse of this cycle of apparant but not truly existent error is liberation." He goes on to quote the great commentary to the Kālacakra Tantra, the Vimalaprabhā: "For this reason, that which is called Māra is the stains of dispositions of the samsaric mind of beings; that which is called Buddha is mind free from the dispositions of the samsaric mind."

### The vajrakāya

In the preceding description much use has been made of terms such as channels, winds and drops (seeds). Tāranātha now goes on to describe these more fully from the Kālacakra point of view. It is considered that these describe the nature of existence of one's body, and are also used as tools or symbols on the path of the Six Yogas. As Tāranātha described earlier they are not necessarily to be taken literally; the drops represent the potentials in our experience, the winds the processes, and the channels the structures formed by and that direct those processes.

However, from the point of view of a description of the nature of the body some do take them quite literally. In his text *dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i spyi don*, Taktsang Lotsawa (*stag tshang lo tsa ba shes rab rin chen*) states that apart from the main three channels, the others seem to be filled with blood. It should be borne in mind that although the descriptions of the channels and winds from the point of view of the functioning of the body and that used in the meditation are very similar, they do have different purposes. The system as used in meditation is certainly not to be taken literally; it is a tool, or method, used on the path.

The important points of the description of the vajrakāya (vajra-body) are as follows.

Stretching from the genitals to the crown is the central channel, the avadhūti, with its actual upper opening reaching to the crown, but with a thick branch leading to the midpoint of the eyebrows, and a thin branch reaching to the Brahma-opening (on the very middle of the crown. The channels to the right and left of the central channel, the rasanā and lalanā stretch from the genitals to the crown, parallel to the central channel.

There are centres – clusters of minor channels – branching off from the central channel at six places. At the level of the crown, the forehead, the throat, heart, navel and the "secret"-place, eight finger-widths under the navel centre.

Below the middle of this centre, the lower end of the thicker central channel points slightly to the right and forwards. The lower end of the right channel moves to the left and its tip points to the right and points into the water path. The left channel takes the

central position and points backwards and points into the anus.

These centres, and of course the drops or seeds considered to exist within them, are associated with the different elements (and thereby with different colours):

Crown	space	green
Forehead	water	white
Throat	fire	red
Heart	wind	black
Navel	earth	yellow
Secret	awareness	blue

There are considered to be many channels and minor centres around the body, but these are the main ones, and also the ones that feature in the meditation practices.

Winds in the purified form are called awareness-wind, and in the impure form, action-winds. There are ten of these main winds moving within all these channels. It is also correct to understand these as ten types of winds that move within the channels of the body.

The names of these ten winds and the elements associated with them, are:

Prāṇavāyu (*srog*) – space  
 Samānavāyu (*mnyam gnas*) – wind  
 Udānavāyu (*gyen rgyu*) – fire  
 Vyānavāyu (*khyab byed*) – water  
 Apānavāyu (*thur sel*) – earth  
 Nāgavāyu (*klu*) – awareness  
 Kūrmavāyu (*rus sba*) – wind  
 Kṛikaravāyu (*rtsangs pa*) – fire  
 Devadattavāyu (*lhas byin*) – water  
 Dhanañjayavāyu (*nor rgyal*) – earth

Some of their locations and functions are as follows.

Prāṇavāyu – In the central channel, above the navel, and in the upper channels of the heart. Maintains life, identity and creates many thoughts. If damaged, concentration is broken, lack of consciousness, craziness, finally death.

Samānavāyu – channels on front side (east) of the heart. Preserves the heat in the belly, maintains the separation of nutrients and waste in food, passing nutrients through the body and expelling waste downwards. If damaged, stomach illnesses.

Udānavāyu – south-east channel (of the heart centre). Speech, taste, drinking, eating, spittle, vomiting. If damaged, fever and upper (body) ailments.

Vyānavāyu – exists throughout the body. Combines with the power of the rasanā

channel. In the joints enables stretching and contraction of the limbs; if damaged causes paralysis, palsy.

Apānavāyu – in the central channel, below the navel, and the channels starting on the lower side of the heart. Controls emission and retention of faeces, urine and seed. If damaged, cold and lower ailments.

Nāgavāyu – south-west channel. Eyesight, fatness, belching.

Kūrmavāyu – rear channel. Extension and contraction of the limbs.

Kṛikaravāyu – north-west channel. Anger, distraction, intoxication.

Devadattavāyu – Left channel. Yawning, and creates ailments of the winds.

Dhanañjayavāyu – north-east channel. Earth ailments; ailments that will last a long time.

Two of these winds are considered to be physical winds. These are the life wind (Prāṇavāyu) and the "downward-clearing" wind (Apānavāyu).

The four main seeds, or drops, are considered to exist at four of the main centres:

Forehead – body	– the potential of the element of water
Throat – speech	– the potential of the element of fire
Heart – mind	– the potential of the element of wind
Navel – awareness	– the potential of the element of earth

### The nature of the path

The nature of the path is the union of the embodiment of emptiness possessed of all positive characteristics and unchanging great bliss.

The first five of the six yogas are mainly concerned with the development of the perception of emptiness possessed of all positive characteristics, and only somewhat with the bliss aspect. The last yoga is mainly concerned with the bliss aspect, although this starts to be developed properly in the fifth yoga.

The Six Yogas are: Pratyāhara, Dhyāna, Prāṇāyāma, Dharāṇā, Anusmṛiti and Samādhi.

### Pratyāhara, withdrawal, *so sor sdud pa*

Pratyāhara is essentially a meditative absorption (*ting nge 'dzin*) that is free from mental activity. In particular the connection is cut between the subject and object of the normal five senses of the eye and so forth, and the five objects of form, and so on.

This practice is mostly performed in complete darkness, and is a very powerful method for developing a meditation of great peace, together with an unshakeable presence of

mind, or, mindfulness. Once this has been developed to a deep level, and a certain degree of genuine non-conceptual awareness arisen, images start to appear to the mind, completely naturally and without prompting. These are known as empty-forms (*stong gzugs*), because they are not external, and are clearly empty of any independent existence. They are natural manifestations from the mind.

The most common forms are visual images but they can also entail the other senses. The pure awareness of the five senses of the eyes, nose, ears, tongue and body, engages with these otherwise empty forms, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations. This develops a blissful experience, and, focussing the attention void of any artifice, one experiences the appearances of empty-forms for the first time.

These forms are the signs of success in the meditation, and there are said to be ten of these. These are called smoke, mirage, fire-fly, lamp, and so forth. This does not mean that the signs look like these images, more that these describe different manners of appearance. For example, one might see an image of a person. That image might be murky, flickering, unstable, bright, stable, and so forth, and these characteristics determine to which amongst the ten signs it belongs.

### **Dhyāna, mental focus, *bsam gtan***

The essence of Dhyāna is to settle the mind one-pointedly on the empty-forms. Most importantly the mind is settled on the equality and inseparable nature of mind and forms. There are several steps in this process of coming to perceive these empty-forms, understand them, and control them.

These first two aspects to the practice have the effect of calming the motion of the action-winds through the right and left rasanā and lalanā channels, enabling the next practices to bring the winds into the central channel.

### **Prāṇāyāma, wind control, *srog rtsol***

The process of Prāṇāyāma is the yoga that combines the Prāṇa and Apāna winds into one entity in the central channel, through suppressing the movements in the rasanā and lalanā channels. This is

mainly done by means of vajra-repetition meditations, observing the coming and going of the breath, and other breath-manipulation exercises.

Translation note: **Vajra-repetition:** the term *rdo rje'i bzlas pa* is very often misleadingly translated as vajra-recitation. This comes from the fact that the most common use of the term *bzlas pa* is in the context of mantra repetition, where the term recitation is acceptable, although not quite correct. But the term *bzlas pa* means "to do something again and again" (Mipham), and with these current practices, a meditation is repeated, there is nothing recited.

### **Dharāṇā, retention, *'dzin pa***

Dharāṇā is concerned with the winds in the central channel that in Prāṇāyāma originated from the ten aspects of the right and left winds. Here, these Prāṇa and Apāna winds that have been combined into one entity are made stable by means of breathing exercises

and are merged into the indestructible seeds in the central channel. This is the dissolution, or fading, of the coming and going of the winds. Their dissolution back into the seeds from which they originated.

### **Anusmṛiti, consummation, *rjes dran***

With Anusmṛiti the practioner's body is substituted by the mahāmūdrā of empty-form. (The practioner's body is naturally perceived as appearing as Kālacakra in union with the consort, Viśvamātā.) Through the union of male and female divine empty-forms, based on the blazing-melting of the white and red elements of the practioner's physical body, one repeatedly cultivates and perfects the four joys in both progression and regression. Not only does this successively increase the experience of bliss but it also increases the experience of empty-form. Having brought the movement of the winds under

control, the practitioner now starts to practise with the seeds and winds and the forces that operate between them. This mainly entails Tummo (*gtum mo*) and similar practices.

Translation note: **Blazing-melting:** this refers to the interaction between the white element (bodhicitta) at the top of the central channel, and the red element, at or just below the navel. The blazing of the fire of the red element causes the white element to melt. This in turn enriches the red element causing further burning and melting. The interplay between these two is active all the time, most strongly in sexual activity. In Anusmṛiti and similar practices it is controlled and developed within the meditation.

**Consummation:** anusmṛiti would normally translate as recollection, but in this context this does not seem to have sufficient strength or depth. Anusmṛiti represents something of a culmination, or fulfillment, of the processes of the previous four yogas. There is a process of cumulative development on the path that suggests the use of the word consummation. This word also usefully carries something of the sense of working with the sexual dispositions, the disposition of the melting bliss. In the theory of this yoga, the 10 stages of passion (*'dod pa'i gnas skabs bcu*) are purified into the 10 consummations.

### **Samādhi, absorption, *ting nge 'dzin***

With Samādhi the sexual desire of the empty-form of the personal deity creates unchanging bliss. That desire is tranformed into great bliss and compassion towards all beings. This has the nature of both method and understanding, and is free from subject and object and is explained as the equality of empty-form and bliss. In many ways this is an extension of the previous yoga. As the emptiness aspect of the practice has now been well developed, the emphasis now fully falls on the development of great bliss.

### **Characteristics of the Six Yogas**

The essence of Pratyāhara is non-conceptualisation through petrifying the mind.

The essence of Dhyāna is focussing the mind on the appearances of empty-form.

The essence of Prāṇāyāma is to prevent the action-winds from moving outside the central channel.

The essence of Dharāṇā is to reduce the winds to nothing.

The essence of Anusmṛiti is the great passion of the blazing Tummo.

The essence of Samādhi is the unchanging bliss of the seeds.

Pratyāhara and Dhyāna are yogas of the channels, as they are the best for purifying the paths of the channels.

Prāṇāyāma and Dharāṇā reduce the movements of the winds of sun and moon.

Anusmṛiti and Samādhi are yogas of the seeds.

Pratyāhara is free from mental activity, but it is not simply a state in which thoughts have been stopped. Without any artificiality, by engaging with that reality which is the pure awareness which is naturally free from mental activity, incidental thoughts are reduced and one spontaneously comes to rest in pure awareness.

The experience of empty-forms is stabilised with the practice of Dhyāna, and this stability in the practice means that the empty-forms cannot be stopped.

There are five aspects to the development of Dhyāna: with the aspect of understanding the forms are simply observed; with appreciation they are recognised; with analysis they are understood for what they are; with joy one develops attachment to the forms; and, with unwavering bliss one identifies the forms with mind.

Prāṇāyāma is a method for reverting the impure winds with the characteristics of sun and moon into awareness winds. This awareness wind is in essence the same as empty-form mahāmūdrā, but the practitioner has not previously perceived the empty-forms as being the vital essence of the winds.

By focusing on these empty-forms one applies the methods of breathing exercises and so forth to gradually restrict the movements of the solar and lunar winds. These solar and lunar winds are the obstacles that prevent the perception of the true nature of the winds, and as these are gradually reduced and dissolved one develops a real experience of the nature of empty-form.

Dharāṇā: The "ultimate seed" exists as the empty-form mahāmūdrā with the nature of great bliss. This blissful reality exists as the essence of the physical seed in the navel centre of the conventional channels and centres, and from it arises the process of all incidental appearances. This is the basis for all the subtle and coarse winds, and they originated from there. From wherever they originated, so there will they be returned.

So, Dharāṇā is the method for coercing the subtle and coarse winds into the physical seeds, so that which originally created the structure of life appears as the seed of great bliss which is developed properly (its activity purified) in the next two yogas,



There are six stages of the appearance of empty-form: In Pratyāhara they appear just as images and in Dhyāna these are understood directly without elaboration. In Prāṇāyāma they appear as the form Prāṇa, and in Dharāṇā they appear as the vitality of the drops. In Anusmṛiti they appear as the essence of the blazing-melting Tummo, and in Samādhi they appear as the unchanging drop.

There are six stages of bliss: in Pratyāhara there is just a subtle mental bliss, and in Dhyāna a greatly purified joyful bliss. In Prāṇāyāma there is the bliss of the merging of the Prāṇa and Apāna winds, and in Dharāṇā the bliss of the active blazing-melting Tummo. In Anusmṛiti there is the bliss of blazing-melting Mahāmūdrā, and in Samādhi the unchanging bliss.

There are also six stages of abandoning the appearance of duality: in Pratyāhara it is abandoned in the manner of non-conceptualisation, and in Dhyāna as the perception of the nature of mind. These two depend just upon empty-form.

In Prāṇāyāma it is abandoned by means of stopping the movements of the right and left winds, and in Dharāṇā by allowing these to naturally subside. By means of these two, general subject-object perceptions are suppressed.

In Anusmṛiti it is abandoned through sealing with bliss and emptiness, and in Samādhi by transforming everything in one's experience. With these two it is abandoned by transforming in meditation all appearances of subject and object as uncreated.

There are many other correspondences and attributes associated with the Six Yogas, but a suitable list with which to finish refers back to the six steps in the process of the creation of saṃsāra referred to by Rangjung Dorje.

Pratyāhara is associated with the appearance of signs. It purifies the skandha of awareness, transforming it into the buddha Vajrasattva.

Dhyāna is associated with the stability of those signs. It purifies the skandha of consciousness, transforming it into the buddha Akṣobhya.

Prāṇāyāma is associated with the bringing together of the right and left mandalas (winds of the elements). It purifies the skandha of response, transforming it into the buddha Amoghasiddhi.

Dharāṇā is associated with the retention of the prāṇa wind. It purifies the skandha of sensation, transforming it into the buddha Ratnasambhava.

Anusmṛiti is associated with the instances of desire in the central channel. It purifies the skandha of interpretation, transforming it into the buddha Amitābha.

Samādhi is associated with the cessation of all ten winds. It purifies the skandha of form, transforming it into the buddha Vairocana.

Similar descriptions and associations with the Six Yogas could be made with the

purification of the six elements and their transformation into the six goddesses, consorts of the buddhas.



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Last updated 29 October 2016.

[Return to Home Page.](#)